



K-pop as Music, Industry and Market

Publishing and Songwriting for Music Export to South Korea

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to provide useful information to Finnish publishers and songwriters who would be interested in K-pop. The overall research was implemented through in-depth analyses of the music, the local industry, and the market. Statistics, actual examples, and expert interviews were also included to demonstrate the characteristics of each topic effectively.

K-pop is hard to be clearly defined only as one genre, but it does have its unique features derived from the industrial characteristics. Over a few decades, the K-pop industry has developed its musical diversity and unique industrial system. As the territory of K-pop is enlarging, international relations have become closer than ever before.

To the Finnish music industry insiders, it was advised to react promptly to the fast-changing market and to be proactive to build a local network instead of relying on the current circumstances. Familiarization with the cultural aspects as well as the music was also highly recommended to optimize their capabilities for entering the market.

Key words: k-pop, music industry, publishing, music export, songwriting

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

A&R	An abbreviation term of Artist and Repertoire. Personnel or a department in music companies designated for collecting demo songs and choosing the best fit for their affiliated artists
Cut	A song has been chosen to be released
Drama	TV Series, commonly called Korean fictional TV show in Korea
Double	Audio tracks in the singer performs as same as the lead track, commonly used production technique to make the sound bigger and stand out from instrumentals
Idol	Another way which K-pop artist(s) are called in Korea
Idol music	Globally known as 'K-pop', Korean dance pop in general
Lead	Information provided from record labels including requirements of song elements
Middle 8	Contrasting section in the middle of a song, also called Bridge or C-part
OST	An abbreviation term of Original Soundtrack. The music used for TV shows or films.
Sub-unit	A sub-band consisting of the members of one multi-member band
Synch	An abbreviation term of Synchronization. Commonly used for music being licensed for other media platforms such as TV commercials and films
Topline	Melody sung by vocalist in a song

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to provide useful information for Finnish songwriters and publishers who have become recently interested in K-pop and the industry. The initial idea of my research started with one question: What factors they need to consider before stepping into the K-pop industry? To find the right answer, this thesis follows the path from basic to specific information regarding the target industry, approaching considerations from the Finnish songwriter/publisher's perspective. Also, two demonstrations of actual K-pop writing will be presented to describe how the characteristics of the music and the industry are applied to the songwriting process.

Some sources used for references are online-based to present the latest trends in South Korea, whereas literature to apply the basic vocational knowledge to the industry. Views on Youtube were used as numeric data since South Korea's official music chart Gaon Chart doesn't open the numbers since 2018. A few sources originally written in Korean and Finnish were inevitably used as references in case the same information was not provided in English.

Two interviews have been implemented with K-pop experts who have rich experiences and understandings in the industry, culture, and the music: Rick Heymann is founder/CEO of Stella Antics entertainment based in Seoul, which operates songwriter management and song camp organizing business since 2015. Karri Mikkonen is a music producer signed to Sugar House Publishing in Finland. He has made multiple accomplishments from Japan and South Korea.

2 OVERVIEW ANALYSIS

The history of K-pop export from Finland began in 1998. Girl duo Nylon Beat's song "Rakastuin mä looseriin" written by Risto Asikainen was sold to Soo-Man Lee, the founder and an executive producer of South Korea's industry-leading record label SM Entertainment. The episode that Lee traveled all around Europe secretly to find the songwriter for his rising-star girl band S.E.S. has become a legend in K-pop history. (Elements music; Remember, I'm Your S.E.S., Youtube 2016.) The pioneers such as Lee opened the door of the new era of K-pop that Korean record labels actively started to look for songs overseas and concentrate on improving their product quality to meet the World's level. Through the effort of over two decades, Korean popular music has finally been acknowledged the potential and flourishing its golden era as a game-changer in the global music market. (KOCIS 2011, 36; Fuhr 2016, 84.) The interesting fact about the history of K-pop is that Finland was one of the very first foreign countries initially stepping into the K-pop market.

Since the K-pop industry has grown so rapidly, the position of the record labels has changed that now they are receiving countless demo songs every week from all around the world (Heymann 2020). Thanks to the globally broadened network, it is not difficult anymore to find overseas songwriters' names in credits of K-pop hits these days. A few Finnish songwriters such as Sara Forsberg and Anna Timgren have accomplished their successful career remarkably in the scene, making the K-pop industry keep an eye on Finnish talents as its prominent partners (Table 1).

TABLE 1. K-pop hits written by Finnish songwriters (Youtube 2020)

Songwriter	Title	Artist	Type	Release date	Views on Youtube (Read on 6.3.2020)
Sara Forsberg	The 7th sense	NCT U	Debut digital single	09.04.2016	82,269,465
Sara Forsberg	Rookie	Red Velvet	Title of 4th Mini album, " Rookie "	31.01.2017	63,963,753
Sara Forsberg	RBB (Really Bad Boy)	Red Velvet	Title of 5th Mini album, " RBB "	31.11.2018	54,736,618
Anna Timgren	Flower shower	HyunA	Digital Single	05.11.2019	16,761,781
Anna Timgren	So what	LOONA	Title of 2nd Mini album, " So what "	05.02.2020	15,675,315

Not only the songwriters, but Finnish publishers are also seeking more opportunities from the Asian market through different methods and network channels that they have been building. Although the ratio of song export towards the Korean music market is not yet on a big scale, South Korea became one of the prime target countries to pursue the growth of international competence (Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016, 18).

2.1 Industry analysis

IFPI (2019) announced that South Korea has recorded 17.9% of market growth in 2018, which is a remarkable leap making the world pay attention. In addition to the promising numbers, which makes this 6th biggest market in the world more special is that now the country owns its proud world-class stars. A Korean boy-band BTS is the most successful case undoubtedly, being placed the second among the top 10 global recording artists between Drake and Ed Sheeran. Their album sales have reached 2.7m and 2.3m respectively from the two previous albums, which were the second and third biggest worldwide in 2018. (IFPI Music report 2019.) A four-girl band Blackpink is following up after BTS, making its latest lead single <Kill this love> a global hit with over 750 million views on Youtube (2020). Multi-national bands such as Twice and EXO are other strong acts produced by big record labels, which have spread their global influence throughout whole Asia. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Top 5 most viewed K-pop bands on Youtube in 2019 (Kpop-radar 2019)

Historically, South Korean labels continuously have knocked on the US and Japan's market doors for a long time. Since BoA and TVXQ from SM Entertainment made successful settle-down into the Japanese market in the early 2000s, lots of artists followed the path and Japan became the first foreign market to take into

account. Later, some popstars with their established labels attempted to get in the US market such as Wondergirls by JYP in the late '00s. (Fuhr 2016, 170) The notable success was made when Psy syndrome hit the globe in 2012, and BTS is writing its ongoing history to a whole different level.

It may not be an exaggeration that producing a new K-pop band is being planned as born-to-be-global nowadays. Thanks to the development of internet-based technology, showcasing artists outside of Korea became easier. The internet enables the firm fan bases from Southeastern Asia and Latin America (Yoon & Jin 2017, 150) as shown in Figure 2.

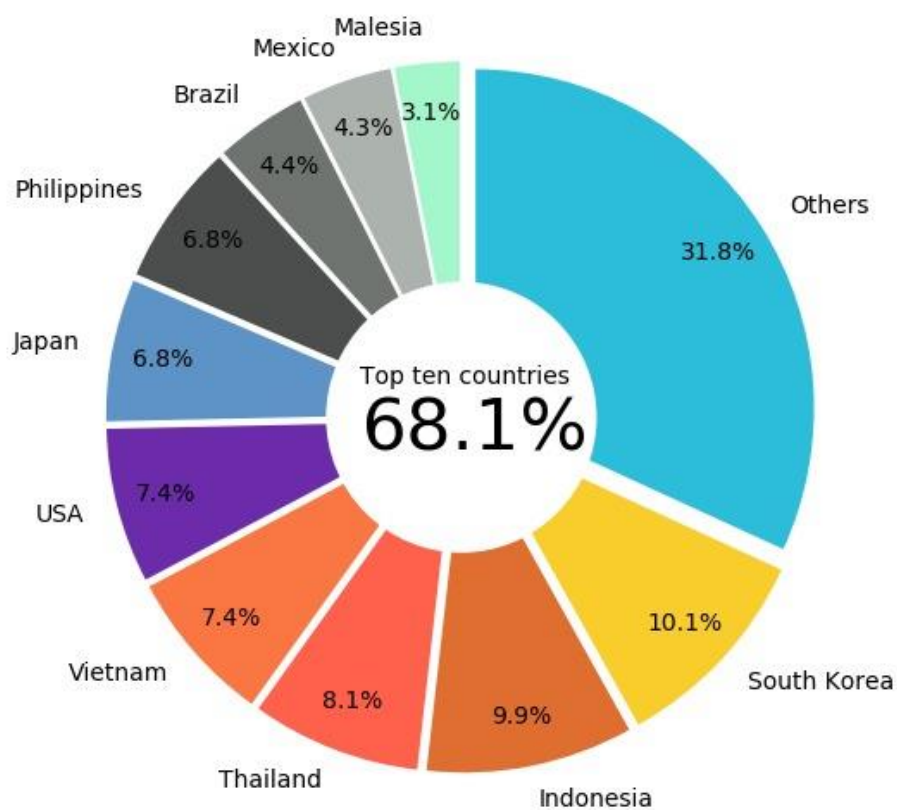


Figure 2. Top 10 K-pop consumer countries on Youtube (K-pop radar 2019)

Once starting to look into the Korean music industry, there are names of record labels inevitable to hear: SM, JYP, YG, and Big Hit Entertainment. K-Pop scene is dominated by these established indie labels although it sounds ironic to call them indie in terms of their business size and market influence. Table 2 shows

that most K-pop bands so-called ‘idols’ are being produced by these ‘Entertainment’ companies. (KOCIS 2011, 38; 2015, 10) The business field of entertainment companies depends on their ability and visions, but merely they do the other culture/music-related businesses on top of the record production. For example, Stone Music Entertainment was founded by CJ E&M (Entertainment and Merchandising), which is a gigantic corporation operating various culture production in Asia. In addition to film and TV show production, the company owns several sub-record labels. In general, the tendency is found that the bigger size they are, the more likely they operate other music-related businesses as well. In consequence, the entertainment companies can cooperate with the other umbrella companies flexibly making effective synergies. This feature that the Korean music industry is closely integrated with media and other relative industries has become a key factor to understand the market. (Shin & Lee 2016, 51.)

TABLE 2. Top 5 Indie record labels in South Korea (Seoulz 2020)

	Label	Representing Artists	Market capitalization (Estimated, USD Billion)	Youtube Subscribers (Million)
1	Big Hit Ent.	BTS, TXT	1.8	31.8
2	JYP Ent.	Twice, ITZY, GOT7	1	14.7
3	SM Ent.	EXO, NCT, RedVelvet	0.95	21.3
4	YG Ent.	BigBang, BlackPink	0.5	5
5	Stone Music Ent.	IZ*ONE	0.3	7.7

This has been pointed out as one of the reasons why the traditional major labels (Universal/Sony/Warner) couldn’t take over the market as they did in other countries (Figure 3).

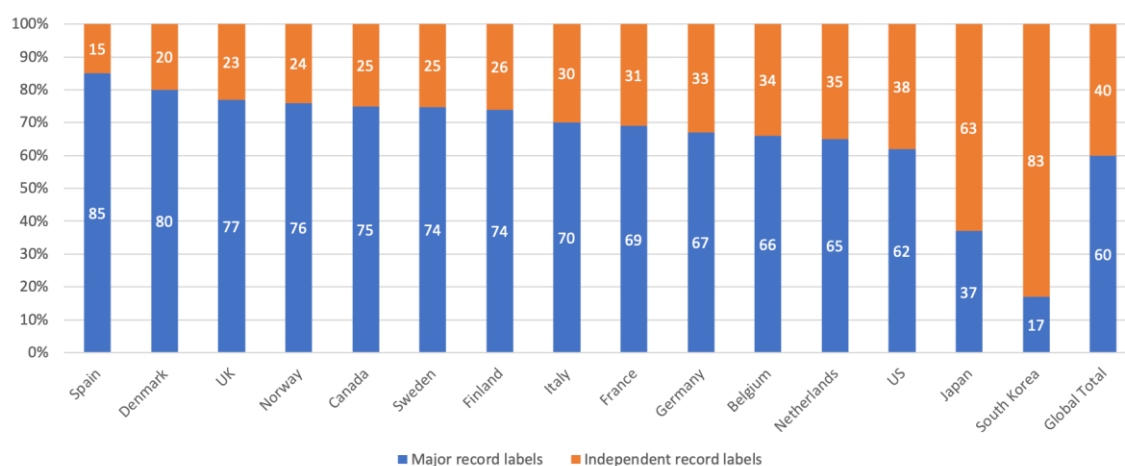


Figure 3. Ratio of market revenue by major and independent labels in each country (Music Industry Blog 2018, modified)

The major labels missed the right moment to maximize their market influences by neglecting the importance of localization and understandings of the close relationship between record and media industries in the country. (Bernstein & Sekine et al. 2013, 250.) As a result, the major labels are mainly focusing on the record distribution from their international acts, promotions, and publishing business currently in South Korea.

2.2 Market consumers in Korea



















































Like other countries, the Korean music market is relying on streaming and video platforms for distribution. However, the sales of albums remain somewhat considerably because of the strong fandoms compared to other markets. The phenomenon is reported especially from boy bands. (KOCCA 2018, 215.)

The K-pop fandoms are an undetachable factor to explain the current success of the scene. The fans used to be regarded as a minor phenomenon within the sub-culture for a long time. However, the fandom culture made record labels paying attention to the purchasing power. The fans don't want to stay only as listeners, they are willing to buy the albums, merchandises, and concert tickets to support the band. Labels are manufacturing repackage albums as a norm to maximize the profit. (KOCCA 2018, 215.)

The international success of K-pop lies on its firm basis of the domestic market. Before <Gangnam Style> shook the world all of a sudden in 2012, Psy had become one of the most established male solo acts in Korea for a long time, building his own artistic identity and career established with his unique character. (KOCIS 2015, 36.) According to Statista's report (2020), The music export from South Korea recorded 513 million USD in 2017, whereas the import was only 14 million USD in the same year.

The KOCCA report (2019) announced that Korean music listeners prefer 'Korean pop songs' the most, followed by English songs. The percentage of listening to English songs are decreasing by 7.8% compared to the previous year. (2019, 39.) Here the use of the term 'K-Pop' needs to be taken care of not to confuse with 'Korean pop song' and 'idol music' which is merely associated with dance/young-aged band tunes Korean pop song can generally mean any kind of popular tune which is sung in Korean. (KOCIS 2011, 73.)

Other Korean popular music has been beloved for a long time from the local listeners. Ballad is the most beloved genre to Korean listeners, followed by dance music. The local hip-hop scene as also known as K-hip hop is popular as well, especially being strong in streaming service platforms. (Fuhr 2016, 49; KOCCA 2018, 42.)

Ranking		Title / Artist	가온지수	Production	Share	Play
1	↗70	 마음을 드려요 아이유 (IU) 사랑의 불시착 OST Part 11	49,830,676	제작 EDAM엔터테인먼트 유통 카카오 M	  	
2	↗1	 아무노래 지코 (ZICO) 아무노래	43,241,573	제작 KOZ 엔터테인먼트 유통 카카오 M	  	
3	new	 FIESTA IZ*ONE (아이즈원) BLOOM*IZ	31,519,601	제작 Stone Music Entertain... 유통 지니뮤직, Stone Music ...	  	
4	↗2	 METEOR 창모 (CHANGMO) Boyhood	29,342,114	제작 엠비션뮤직 유통 지니뮤직, Stone Music ...	  	
5	↗2	 돌만의 세상으로 가 크러쉬 (CRUSH) 사랑의 불시착 OST Part 10	26,017,850	제작 Stone Music Entertain... 유통 지니뮤직	  	
6	↗1	 다시 난, 여기 백예린 사랑의 불시착 OST Part 4	24,226,368	제작 Stone Music Entertain... 유통 지니뮤직	  	
7	↗3	 Psycho 레드벨벳(Red Velvet) 'The ReVe Festival' ...	23,841,539	제작 SM Entertainment 유통 Dreamus	  	
8	↗2	 Blueming 아이유 (IU) Love poem	22,195,378	제작 카카오 M 유통 카카오 M	  	
9	↗2	 늦은 밤 너의 집 앞 골목길에서 노을 늦은 밤 너의 집 앞 골목길에서	20,045,085	제작 씨제스엔터테인먼트 유통 카카오 M	  	
10	↗2	 흔들리는 꽃들 속에서 네 샴푸향이 느껴진거야 정범준 멜로가 체질 OST Part 3	19,287,548	제작 Stone Music Entertain... 유통 지니뮤직, Stone Music ...	  	

Picture 1. Screen capture of Gaon Digital Chart of 8th week in 2020 (Gaon chart 2020)

In the chart above (Picture 1), ballad (#1/5/6/9/10), hip hop (#2/4), and dance tunes (#3/7/8) are ranked in balance. Along with the close relation with the media industry, OST standing for original soundtracks have been traditionally strong in the chart (#1/5/6): Even the growth rate of plays is continuously rising from the previous year (KOCCA 2018, 42). OST tracks are not only as background music but also often they are played with the lyrics in present to maximize the emotional expression. The featuring artist naturally draws the viewer's attention and can become famous, being placed on top of the music chart. (Seoul Magazine 2017, 54.) Hence, the potential of the OST scene is prominent for musicians: it's a powerful method to be presented to K-drama viewers. Especially for songwriters, synchronization and the growing global influences of Korean films and dramas are a huge opportunity.

Not only dramas but reality TV shows related to music have also been beloved for over a decade in Korea. The audition show boom began long ago and passed its golden era in Korea as same as in the other countries, but the TV show production team created advanced business models – They made the game deeper to genre-specific or made pop stars compete such as Miss/Mister Trot (2019-2020) and Queendom (2019). The effect of music TV shows is similar to K-drama: more exposure to audiences. The songs played in the shows can easily chart-in once the artists successfully drew the viewers' attention.

The synergy of labels and production team has been remarkably successful: Record labels can use to expose their next rookie artists and production teams can secure a sufficient number of views from the influence of the labels. Media exposure has been a key factor to promote artists, so the big labels which have the power make it easily possible. Streaming services react fast, lining up the just-aired songs in the real-time chart.

2.3 International relations

Numerous foreign investors are knocking the market's door. One of the most represented countries is China. Instead of investing capital in South Korea's big record labels as a traditional method, Chinese investors started to establish their independent record labels in Korea. From the mid-late 2010s, a few established Chinese labels such as Yuehua Entertainment are launching their Korean branches. Although the labels follow the general system as other players do in Korea, their strength brings the benefit when it comes to easy access to both markets with their capital, experiences, and the international network. (Herman, 2018.)

Relation with the Japanese market has a long history: Japan is attempting to adapt to the system of K-pop. TV show <Produce 48> by CJ E&M where Korean and Japanese trainees of labels competed to debut as project girl band IZ*ONE was aired making plenty of fans even before their debut single release, and the band has recorded remarkable success globally (The Dong-A Ilbo 2019). The phenomenon of localization has been discovered when Korean pop star BoA tried

to get into the Japanese market in the early '00s after signing to Japanese label AVEX: by learning the language to speak fluently on TV shows and by performing songs in Japanese. (Fitzsimmons, L & Lent 2013, 112; Fuhr 2016, 153.) It seems that the trend is going the other way around. Numerous Japanese artists are staying and training in Korea to re-debut in collaboration with Korean local labels (The Dong-A Ilbo 2019). JYP Entertainment is trying to go a few more steps ahead: Audition show <NIZI Project> is on air, the label is actively auditioning Japanese talents to make them the next generation K-pop stars in collaboration with Sony Japan. (Dong 2020.)

There have been joint ventures with foreign partners in the publishing business as well. As the needs of Korean labels towards overseas songwriters keep on growing. Ekko Music Rights is an international publishing company based in Stockholm and Seoul founded from a joint venture with an established Swedish publisher Pelle Lindell and SM Entertainment (Music Business Worldwide 2017). The influence of this publishing company in the K-pop market is remarkable, selling out songs not only to SM's but other big labels' superstars such as Twice and BTS. (Ekko Music Rights.)

International collaborations tend to be somewhat affected by political relations, especially with South Korea's neighbor Japan and China. From a business perspective, the history-based political issues between the three countries have been regarded as risks in the industry as well as the others. The ongoing conflict affects the music industries in various ways. It can impact on sales, slow down the collaboration, postpone plans, or revoke projects. (Choi & Maliangkay 2014, 73-75; Herman 2018.)

2.4 Features of K-pop

The term K-pop stands for 'Korean pop', but it is nearly impossible to define all the popular songs in South Korea under the same category of 'idol music': K-pop may represent rather the language of the music or the performance style of the artists, but there are several features hard to be defined within a few words when it comes to the characteristics of the genre. (KOCIS 2011, 11.)

Although S-M Lee bought out the Nylon Beat's song, the label didn't use the original song completely as it was. The middle 8 part of the song was newly added to make it fit for the local listeners. This fact is something lots of overseas songwriters/producers to take into account because this is exactly why it is important to understand the style of K-pop. Since the early days, K-pop has evolved keeping its uniqueness underneath all the time (KOCIS 2011, 32).

The sound of K-pop is getting similar to the Western pop style because the participation of overseas producers is increasing (KOCIS 2011, 11). However, its diverse musical application is one of the most notable features differentiating itself from western pop. Quirky musical attempts incubated the current K-pop as a foundation, which Western music hasn't experienced (Choi & Maliangkay 2014, 4).

To go deeper, the reason why K-pop is very hard to be defined lies in the fact that the music has been influenced by various genres during the past decades. When the contemporary style of K-pop started to evolve in the late '90s, boy band Seo Tae Ji and the boys introduced Hip-hop from the US for the first time to the mainstream Korean pop scene, which sets the rap influence afterward (Russell 2014, 45; KOCIS 2015, 28). Then there was a huge influence by Japanese pop during the early '00s, which became a firm foundation for K-pop to go beyond the domestic market and to develop its global competence. On top of those genres, other imported music such as R&B and Euro-pop influenced throughout their golden era. (Lee & Menta et al. 2019, 300) As accepting foreign music and the style, the hybridity of the music absorbed bumps from taking new trials and it eventually became the playground for music producers to try their fresh ideas. Of course, it was possible provided that it clicked with the unique ecosystem of the industry in South Korea. (Choi & Maliangkay 2014, 5.)

The diversity can be expressed as various-ranged song selection in one album (Fuhr 2016, 92), or even in one song (Lee & Menta et al. 2019, 289-290). SNSD's, also called Girls' generation, hit song <I Got A Boy> was produced by multiple producers from various nationalities and musical influences as "patchwork" (Figure 4). As a result, the song presents the genre variations throughout the whole

running time, making the listeners feel as if the tune was composed like a musical piece. This song became a milestone in the new K-pop era in 2013. (Herman 2019.)



Figure 4. The genre variations in <I Got A Boy> by SNSD (Youtube 2013)

When it comes only to the structure, K-pop songs follow the American standard in general. However, breaking the traditional structure is often found in the tunes whereas western pop. (Fuhr 2016, 89.) On top of chorus parts, having post-chorus or separate hook parts is common. The place for middle 8 can differ, skipping the chorus after the second verse, depending on the productional choices. Middle 8 can be completely different or take some traces from the earlier parts, or just stay instrumental as 'dance break' part. For example, here is the structure of BTS's mega-hit song 'Fake Love' (Figure 5):

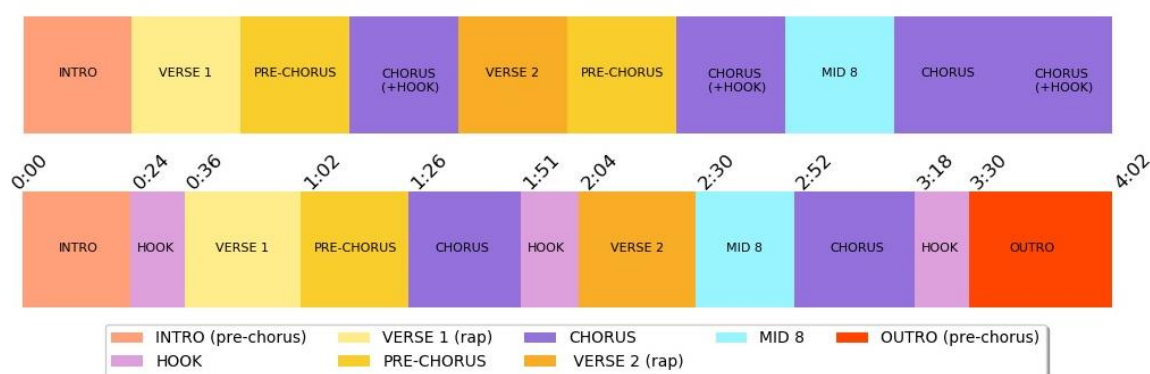


Figure 5. General K-pop structure and the structure of <Fake Love> by BTS (Youtube 2018)

In addition to the productional features, there are several considerations for topliners when it comes to writing a K-pop song: The lyrics, rap part, 2nd verse, and vocal harmonies.

Lyric wise, although most of the original words in a demo will be translated or altered to the local language, still curse words are to be strictly avoided. Lyrical themes implying drug uses are not to be used as well due to the negative sentiment in the country. Sex could be expressed in indirect ways, whereas strong words are considered to avoid if possible. Of course, the local lyricists could handle and there are always exceptions, but the use of words can affect A&R's decision if the whole theme of a song is inappropriate in their opinion. A title word or phrase is especially likely to remain from the demo version that has it repeating multiple times in choruses or hooks with signature dance motion called 'point dance' so that recommended being taken care of as a prime factor when writing (Lie 2015, 145; KOCIS 2011, 33; Mikkonen 2020). After all, captivation of the words weighs heavier than the delivery or grammatic adequacy (Lie 2015, 146).

In K-pop, oftentimes rap part is taken as necessary. Rap usually places in verses or middle 8 sections being performed by rapper-positioned members of the band. As the song is segmented, all members of a band have their positions as vocalist/dancer/rapper. (Song 2019, 127.) It may vary depending on cases, but in case there is at least one rapper in the band, the label requests the part for him or her. The tone of rap can be Western-English rapper-like, whereas it may need to be more cutie or chanty depending on the style of the tune. (Song 2019, 128)

The second verse often goes differently from the first one. Most of the cases, a song plays a different verse after the first chorus so that the listeners feel fresh until the song ends. Although the verses could have some similarities in musical elements, at least any kind of changes such as adding adlibs or harmonies is to be considered in the songwriting process. Picture 2 and 3 presents the different verses in <Wannabe> by ITZY.



Picture 2. The topline of the first verse in <Wannabe> by ITZY (Youtube 2020)

♩ = 122

Err-body err-body err-body wat - ching me (all eyes on me) 이래라 저래라 모두한 마

4

디 썩 (don't touch me) Ah yeah yeah yeah yeah 내 앞 가림 은 내 가 해 I'm a

7

do my thing you just do your thing cuz I'm the one and on - ly 사 람 들 은 남 말

10

하 기를 좋아 해 (la la la) 남 의 인 생 에 뭘 판 심이 많아 왜 (la la la) 저기 미안 하 지 만 신

14

경 줌 꺼 줄 래 요 it's none of your bu-si-ness I do my own bu-si-ness

Picture 3. The topline of the second verse in <Wannabe> by ITZY (Youtube 2020)

Another notable difference is abundant vocal harmonies. K-pop tracks preferably contain plenty of doubles and harmonies, unlike Western mainstream pop. The number of vocal tracks can be around 20 and even more if there are many members in the band. Making a room for all members to sing is an important factor when producing a K-pop tune. (Mikkonen 2020.)

The ecosystem of the 'idol' industry can explain these features. When a K-pop band is formed, the record label chooses the members among their trainees who have various traits to present within one 'package' (KOCIS 2011, 38; Fuhr 2016, 118). All the members need places to perform in a limited time so that dividing their parts into pieces is an inevitable choice (Mikkonen 2020). The highly competitive market leads to the feature as well. To make a song outstanding in the warzone and keep the listeners on being curious about the music, K-pop has been developed by changing parts and by presenting different members for 3 to 4 minute-long of time. In addition to the records, performance and visual elements are a significant part of the industry, represented by choreography and looks. Dance performances are as important as vocal to almost every K-pop artist and the songs need to be danceable for their stage performances. (Fuhr 2016, 82.)

Overseas songwriters and publishers often think of K-pop as one segment of 'Asian pop'. Pop tunes from South Korea, Japan, and China are the ones easily grouped because of the similarities in regional and cultural characteristics. However, some musical features can be opposite to the others so sufficient study on music needs to be accompanied when entering the markets. (Lee & Menta et al. 2019, 247.)

J-pop is often regarded as a similar scene to K-pop with the common features derived from their close regions and cultures. Multi-member bands and making sub-units from them after debut are a standard strategy in both markets. Some K-pop bands release the same song to both markets in each language. For those reasons, songwriters writing K-pop are usually requested to write J-pop tunes as well, believing the comprehension of the South Korean music lowers the entry barrier to the other.

However, there are clear differences in the music style. Japanese pop tends to remain their unique style, whereas K-pop always changes and follows the latest global trends. The tempo tends to be faster in K-pop and rap parts are hardly found in J-pop. (KOCIS 2011, 33.) Of course, these days the gap is becoming thinner since K-pop artists started successfully get in the Japanese Chart, but

still, K-pop bands are releasing separate tunes that fit the best in each market as well.

3 CONSIDERATIONS

When a song gets cut, the songwriter(s) receives a song fee and royalties. In case the writer signed a deal with a publisher, regardless of exclusive contract or single publishing agreement song by song, the publisher gets some part of royalty shares as agreed in the contract. It may take 3 to 6 months to get the first royalty share after the song release in general. (Heymann 2020.) The details are not open information since it varies from all different cases and to avoid any legal violation regarding confidentiality of contracts, but generally between zero to 40,000 USD, and if the song is released as a single or synced, can go to 6-digit of value (Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016, 20). Rodrigo Dominguez mentioned about the income of K-pop songwriters that two single releases per year could guarantee them financially stable to concentrate on their works (Midem 2019).

3.1 Publishing systems

The publishing system in South Korea follows the global standard so the role of publishers is the same as other countries in general (Heymann 2020). Nevertheless, there are still additional considerations to be conscious.

First of all, the decision power of A&Rs is not to be neglected, especially in the current K-pop industry represented as 'Idol'. Although singer-songwriter idol stars are becoming a trend, still most of the artists release songs which are written by other songwriters and chosen by their A&Rs. There are always A&R teams who decide the concept and direction of the next release, collect demos from all around the world on behalf of the artists. Songwriters who are new in this scene will soon realize that there won't be many opportunities that they can work with the artists in sessions, but there are ways to talk with their A&Rs or the partner publishers instead. Keeping this fact in mind, the three methods of K-pop song writing and collecting are commonly implemented as below (Mikkonen 2020; Heymann 2020.):

1) by having sessions with other songwriters to work on the leads provided from the label or publishers, or

- 2) by having song camps hosted by labels or publishers with other songwriters, or
- 3) by pitching songs in catalogs.

The most common way among them is 1) working on leads. Even though the method is known as the least preferred in other cases since the artist won't be attending there, working in sessions without the artists has become a norm in K-pop production for the aforementioned reason. Moreover, remote work often takes place when a producer needs to get toplines and demo vocal tracks from other songwriters. Hence, the whole production could take a long time to finalize the demo and pitch in time unless the following step by toplineers is not done quickly enough. (Mikkonen 2020.) A&Rs of record labels spread their leads to their partner publishers and collect the demos from all over the world. The number of demos can be hundreds, depending on the size of labels, receiving every week. (Heymann 2020.)

2) Song camps are being taken place by A&Rs of big record labels or publishers having a global network. Songwriters participating in those song camps tend to have somewhat international success in their careers because the host invites them selectively who could achieve their specific requirements for the demos. Therefore, the possibility of getting placements is much higher than the earlier one since the songwriters can advantage to contact directly to the A&Rs and receive instant feedback. (Mikkonen 2020.)

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Getting cuts from 3) catalogs is fairly difficult to make it because the labels usually want to collect tailor-made demos that can fit the specific style for their artists. That is why it might take a long time until a song in the catalog is found and released. (Mikkonen 2020.)

If a demo song makes it to catch the attention of A&Rs, they proceed with the next step through internal discussions. The label informs the songwriters and publishers involved in the project that the company wants to release the song. Asking for revision of the demo is common in this phase. The request can be altering some productions or changing arrangements in specific parts, to make the song fit the artist better. When all the possible changes are made, a lyricist

re-write the lyrics in the local language. (Heymann 2020.) When the lyrics are complete, the record label starts to record with the artists and finalize the product. This whole framework may take a few weeks to months.

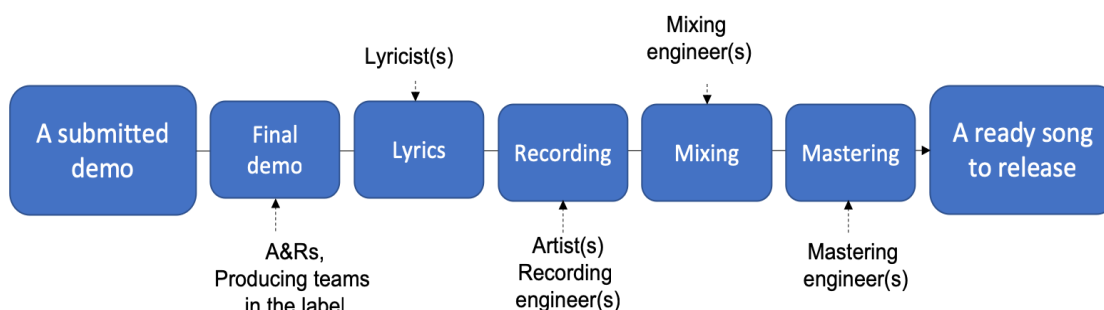


Figure 6. The framework of postproduction of a record (Bae & Park 2019)

Of course, this diagram above (Figure 6) is based on the assumption when the songs have been chosen in the first place. It can take a much longer time at the beginning of the postproduction process otherwise. Instead of auditioning thousands of catalogs, most Korean record labels prefer to keep some of the submitted demos exclusively if the songs have potentials for the next projects. This status called ‘on-hold’ doesn’t guarantee when the song is going to be released, or whether it is. The period for on-hold depends on the labels, which can be from 2 months to many years until further notice, which they may inform the publishers about their policies in advance. (Mikkonen 2020.)

No matter which method among the aforementioned the song was delivered by, it is possible to take a few years from the birth of the song to be released fairly often. Often Korean record labels keep collecting the demos until they find the best song for the title when it comes to an album-sized project. (Heymann 2020) From the songwriter's perspective, it can take multiple years to make their song cut for the first time while deadlines of leads are tight and the workload is excessive (Mikkonen 2020). This feature explains why lots of songwriters say that writing K-pop is a long-term battle.

The term “publishing” hadn’t been used for a long time in South Korea. Even until the last decade, insiders in the industry regarded songwriting as the record label’s business. (MCST 2012, 34.) This background affected the publishing business

as well as the industry culture. The general status of songwriters in South Korea can be classified as below:

- 1) In-house writers affiliated with a record label, or
- 2) Writers affiliated with 'production team', or
- 3) Writers affiliated with a major publisher, or
- 4) Freelancer/ independent songwriters.

These cases 1) and 2) would be hardly found in Finland, whereas they are very common in the Korean industry. Songwriters so-called 'in-house writers' are mostly affiliated with established record labels. Their priority is hence to write songs for the artist under the same house. This is an effective method when the label wants to keep their confidential projects and optimize their productional choices provided that the writers' capability is acknowledged. On the other hand, as the industry is adapting the global standards, the tendency seems gradually changing. One of the notable cases is that JYP Entertainment established its in-house publishing company called JYP Publishing. Through the channel, the company allows JYP's signed house-songwriters to pitch their songs for artists outside of the label as well. (JYP Publishing.)

The second method is operated, regardless of signing any publishing deal, by production managers like Heymann who manage songwriters in the team and pitch the songs as shown in Figure 7.

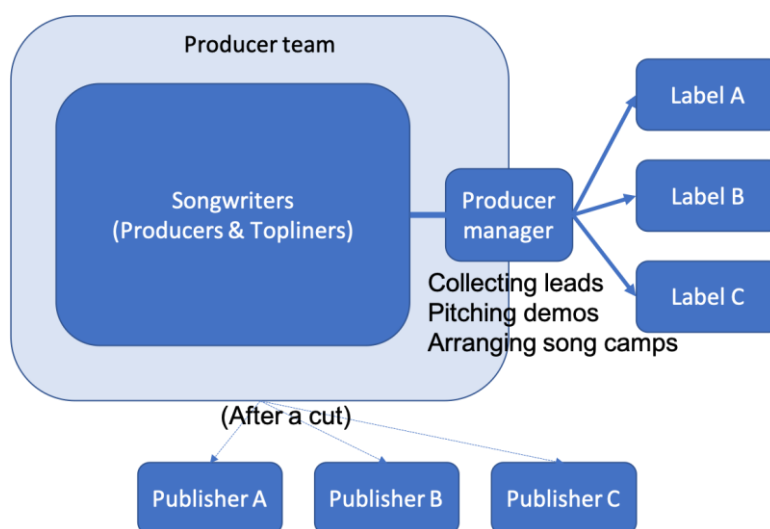


Figure 7. The role of a producer manager and the framework (Heymann 2020)

That may sound like a Publisher's job, but the difference is that the managers don't take part in the administration of royalty distribution. The strength of working with a producer manager is that the system gives the songwriters freedom of choice to work. When a song gets cut, the songwriters can freely decide a publishing company to sign a single publishing deal. Since the cut can be made free from any publisher in this way, the songwriter gets the upper hand to choose a publishing company for royalty administration. (Heymann 2020.) The region where songwriters reside isn't prime matter if the manager can connect actively with the partner labels so that the location and additional intermediary as sub-publisher become a minor factor. Also, the team can easily change the position to a publishing company later once the producing company gets stable with its secured partners.

Most labels are actively communicating with multiple 3rd party songwriting houses, no matter either foreign or domestic, to collaborate for the best fit of the concept and to adapt the most up-to-date trend in the global pop music scene and techniques. As the opportunities are increasing, writing a song with co-writer has settled down as a popular method. Co-writing enables songwriters to put the strengths together from everyone in a session, so it makes the outcome present its best possible in product value. Moreover, having co-writing sessions with established songwriters offers opportunities to learn their know-how and to expand the co-writing pool network. (Gammons 2011, 116.)

For the reason, finding multiple co-writers' names in song credits is no longer difficult. In a K-pop co-writing session, there can be usually 3 to 5 songwriters to write one song. The ratio of royalty share could affect in practice when it comes to multiple participants. Regardless of the quality of the outcome, adding more names into credits means less income to individuals anyhow. Because there would be other shareholders including publishers in addition to the songwriters, it makes the situation even more complicated. That is what publishers would like to avoid if possible so that it can result in limiting opportunities for songwriters. Besides, sharing 50/50 of royalty, which is a standard sub-publishing split ratio for songwriters in Finland, makes the songwriters end up receiving a much smaller piece from the entire pie (Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016, 10).

3.2 Sub-publishing

The collaborative work with sub-publishers has been essential in the international music industry. Sub-publishing system has been a norm in the international music industry because of its definite benefits. The successful partnership between publishers from different parts of the world can work as a strength, provided that the sub-publisher has sufficient insight and understanding of the market that a foreign publisher can't easily acquire. A Sub-publisher can ease the work as an intermediary, administrating royalties from local sales as well as providing leads to its international partners, collecting demos, and forwarding them to the local record labels to promote on behalf of partner publishers from other countries. (Taylor-Jones 2012, 28.) The frameworks of international publishing (except the US due to their different royalty distribution rule) may look as Figure 6 and 7:

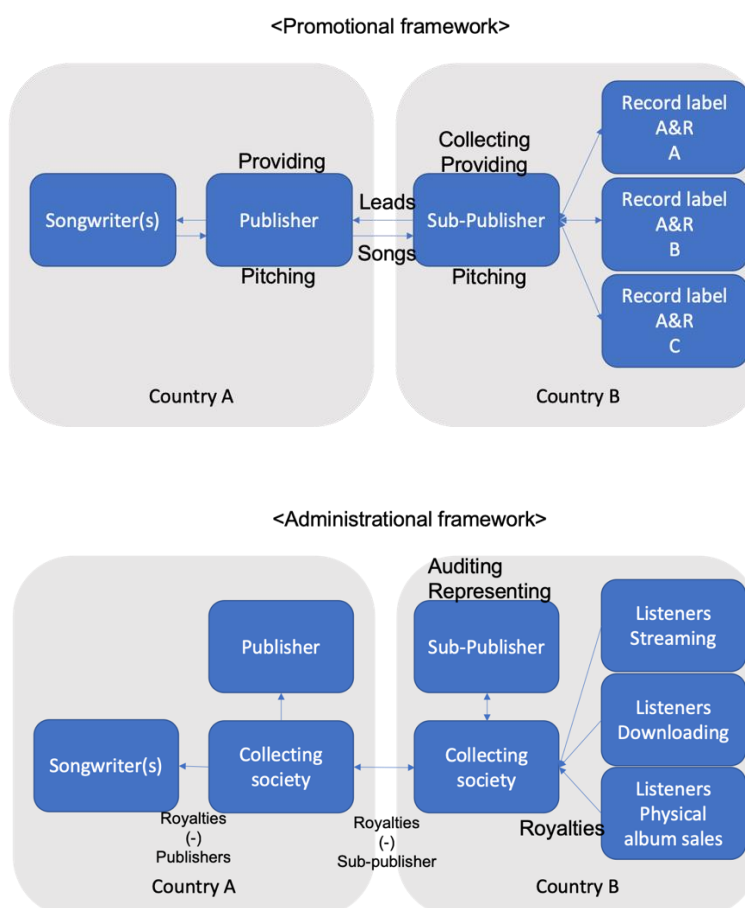


Figure 6 and 7. The promotional and administrative framework of international publishing

Because of its efficiency, sub-publishing has been a standard method for a long time in the industry worldwide. When it comes to the K-pop industry, the differences in the system became a great barrier to foreign publishers from knocking the door to the Korean music industry. Since its unique industrial ecology that indie record labels (non-major labels) and the domination of local music streaming platforms in the market, getting familiarized and understanding the industry has become the core factor to get into the business. Therefore, for foreign publishers who want to get into the market fast with the least risk, establishing a partnership with local publishers is regarded as an inevitable short-cut. (Gammons 2011, 97.)

The complications and rapid changes in copyright laws also make it more difficult. The issues caused by the differences in industrial systems between Korea and other countries seem complicated to solve (MSCT 2012, 66). Moreover, along with the economic growth and the boost of culture business, there are lots of ongoing amendments on the laws and royalty distribution system in South Korea (Parc & Messerlin et al. 2017, 144). Although most of the revisions regarding royalty rates are positive moves, it is a fact that they may confuse the potential international partners in the beginning. It may be nearly impossible to adapt all the updates and react to the business as fast as a publisher should without sub-publishers help.

Nevertheless, working with sub-publishers leads to additional considerations. 10 to 20 percents of gross revenues go to the sub-publisher in general, and it is a somewhat considerable number (Taylor-Jones 2012, 28). Hence, taking the time to find the right local partner with a clear vision is highly recommended in the K-pop industry, likewise other countries. The point is, there are additional considerations regarding sub-publishing to take a look at the characteristics of the industry.

First of all, a small catalog of a publisher would be hardly able to catch the local partner's attention. Major publishing companies usually have plenty of other global partners worldwide, so the competition already begins when selecting the songs to the pitching table. Also, the network of foreign publishers may weaken

when the contact person in the local country leaves the company. (Gammons 2011,98.)

Moreover, leads delivered by sub-publishers can be shared with their other partners travelling around in the network. Whereas in Korea, record labels spread their leads their hand-in-hand partners as well, which may contain more specific information on the song they are looking for. In other words, a direct network takes advantage of being a few steps ahead than other competitors worldwide. Besides, labels may offer exclusive opportunities to their close partners through physical meetings (Fuhr 2016, 86).

These are the reason why building a direct relationship with record labels as well as sub-publishers is required. It affects A&Rs' decision making if they recognize who is pitching a song and who wrote it in their perspective. Giving them a good impression, as well as good quality of demos, needs to be considered and taken care of by publishers. In addition to building the initial step of a relationship, maintaining it is another winning strategy. Visiting the country and having meetings face to face with the local partners are highly recommended (Heymann 2020). The direct connection to record labels can eventually reduce extra barriers and possibly make straight to the table if the songs have potential.

3.3 Music Finland

As aforementioned, to develop and to maintain good relationships with the local partners is considered as the competence of publishers. When it comes to Finland, the national music association Music Finland organizes yearly events providing opportunities to get to know the local industry and to break the ice with their faraway partners by sending them to Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea. (Music Finland 2019a.) It has been helping them to lower the entry barrier and to make actual accomplishments through the events.

Music Finland supports songwriters as well as publishers in Finland to encourage them to explore out of the Finnish music market and to enhance their competi-

tiveness on a global scale. It is a phenomenon that Scandinavian countries support actively their local music business insiders to export their acts globally, which is a somewhat big privilege compared to other countries such as South Korea. (Heymann 2020.) On top of inviting Finnish publishers to the foreign countries, Music Finland organizes A-pop Castle song camp, which opens the door to Finnish songwriters to get into the Asian pop scene much easier by giving them the opportunities to work with local artists (Music Finland 2019b).

That said, the size of the artists and cuts made from the camp is yet questionable compared to other European competitors (Music Finland 2019c). They may help the songwriters open the first door to the market, but ironically, there are limits to make it into the next level when it's an open opportunity. The labels wouldn't want to take risks by giving too big chances to entry-level songwriters. They may put aside 'real-deal' opportunities to optimize the possibility that they receive the best song possible. This point again concludes that the competence and vision of the publisher and songwriter will lead them to greater success eventually.

In conclusion, the organization needs to follow and adapt to the global trend faster. South Korean Music industry is moving incredibly fast, and the musical trend changes all the time due to the high competition (Messerlin & Shin 2016, 15; Midem 2019). From the publishers' perspective, in particular, getting support from them is an undeniable benefit, but they need to try to go beyond that as well if chasing bigger opportunities.

3.4 Industrial culture

Although Henry Wadsworth said that music is the "universal language of mankind", the entire business is implemented by the people inside after all. Knowledge of the working culture hence can be advantageous when it comes to the business situation. The music industry in South Korea is no exception. Trust building on the quality of demos as well as the considerate business attitude leads to success.

First of all, publishers need to understand the perfectionism of K-pop caused by high competition. Record labels invest a huge amount of capital to make their artists successfully catch public attention. Therefore, they want to make sure every single part of the entire project as best as possible. There is no difference in the demo tracks. An unfinished demo can result in a straight turn-down by record labels. The vocal performance and mixing in a demo song are to be taken care of as well, even though the vocal track won't be in the final product, because it can convey overall ideas about how the song needs to be presented. A polished demo helps the A&Rs to find the actual value of the song. In other words, a demo song must be produced as perfectly as if it was for the actual release. Moreover, the quality of the demo affects the A&Rs' evaluation of the songwriters as well. If the song hasn't reached a sufficient level of quality, it is advised not to be sent. It may lead to a negative impression, which affects their decision afterward. In the same context, the confidentiality of leads must be kept strictly. An overdue deadline can lead to a straight turn-down in usual cases. (Heymann 2020.)

4 K-POP WRITING IN PRACTICE

In this chapter, two songs written by me will be introduced to demonstrate how K-pop writing works in practice from a topliner's perspective. Each song was written in different circumstances, one remotely and the other one in a session, so they present how the songs were approached and elaborated depending on the situation.

Due to the highly sensitive treatment on confidentiality in the industry, some information regarding the melodies and the entire lyrics wouldn't be presented to protect the product values. Instead, here I share the initial approach and considerations that were explained in earlier chapters, following in chronicle order.

4.1 Take It or Leave It

The song was written for a female solo artist in November 2019. I received the lead in the same month and then suggested one of my good colleague producers to work on the song together. Since he was staying outside of Finland at the moment, the project had to be implemented remotely by bouncing off ideas on tracks and toplines as each other's position.

Firstly, and as always, I started to research the artist. While auditioning the artist's previous releases and music videos, initial direction started to be grasped. Especially her vocal tone and the range were quite bright and high compared to other K-pop artists, so those were the elements to take account of. Moreover, the overall topline had to be suitable for dance performances, which is her strong artistic feature. The tempo was also set to 108 to optimize that.

The producer sent me a simple instrumental track that consists of the first half of the song (intro, verse, pre, and chorus). I started to sketch my topline ideas on it until they sound solid. The lyrics were not written down yet, so the melody was recorded with simple syllables such as 'na' or 'ta-ra-ra' at first. Meanwhile, I came up with the phrase 'take it or leave it'. The phrase sounded like a title to me, so the lyrical concept of the song was built from there.

After making the topline and the lyrics of the first part settle, I focused on how to make it more interesting. The first half of the song had to keep the listeners' attention and to convey it to the chorus successfully. Making part changes would have been the technique for that, but I needed an alternative method since the song was for a solo artist. Hence, I added some one-shot adlibs and simple phrases here and there as so-called 'ear-candies'.

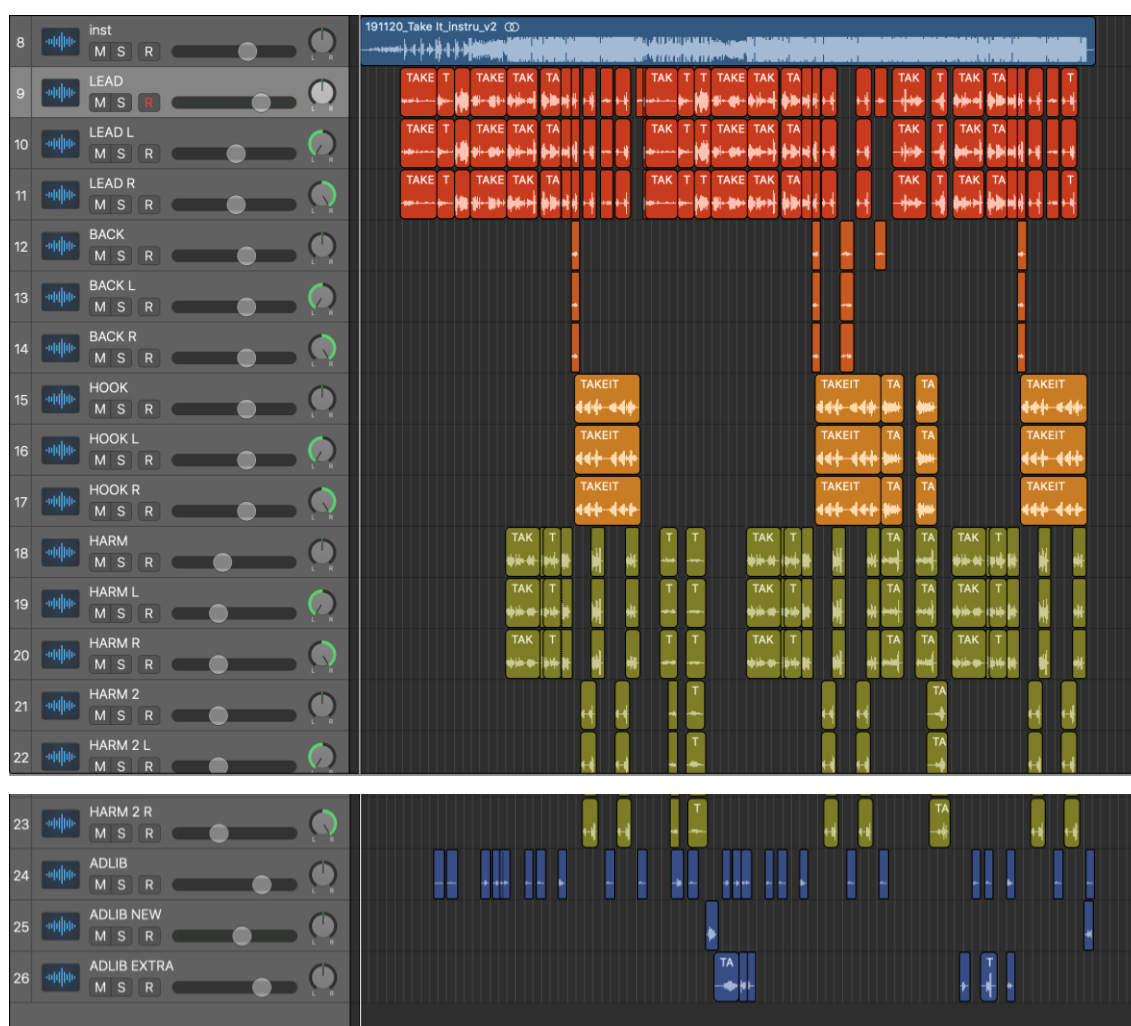
I sent the idea to the producer and we decided to make a post-chorus. To brainstorm new ideas quickly, we just looped the chorus up to the next 8 bars at first. The topline in the part had to be easy, simple, and repetitive to give a little contrast to the melodious chorus. The title words needed enough repetition here as well, so I split the phrase into two parts to fit the rhythm. That brought a strong impact as if a protagonist of the song had been speaking the words.

Then we moved onto the next half. We could have made the second verse different, but I decided to keep the same melody with the first one since that fitted well with the track. Some different approaches were needed instead, thus some other adlibs and harmony layers were added under the topline to differentiate the part from the first one.

Up to this phase, the two-third of the structure (verse, pre-chorus, chorus, post-chorus, verse, pre-chorus, chorus, post-chorus) was complete, and then it was time for the middle 8. We didn't want to make the part completely different from the others but bring somewhat freshness with a high-note climax. I made the melody and added the words to it.

All the structure and toplines were complete, but there were still lots of things to be considered for harmonies, doubles, and adlibs. I listened through the song multiple times to seize some instant ideas and recorded them right away. Even though the song was supposed to be for a solo artist, the song had to sound bigger and wider. I tried not to add more than 2 pairs of harmony layers as background elements. Again, I played back the song over and over until any flaws were found and fixed.

All the vocal elements on the song were settled, but there was one last thing to do. The vocal recording had to be redone for the best quality because the vocal tracks were recorded through a built-in microphone on my computer until then. I sat up recording gear and recorded the tracks as clean as possible. The vocal performance was the most important factor to take care of in this phase. I imagined how the singer would sing the song and adjust the tone part by part. I ended up having 18 vocal tracks including lead, backing, hook, harmonies, and adlibs as shown in Picture 4. Finally, I sent the vocal stems to the producer for mixing and the final production.



Picture 4. The vocal tracks of <Take It or Leave It> on Logic X

Although the song didn't get the place as it was aimed at, it received good responses by the publishers in Finland and South Korea. The song is in my catalog waiting for the next pitch.

4.2 Pretty Bad

The song was complete in January 2020. At the beginning of the project, another good colleague producer of mine and I were planning to write a song for one Korean girl band. We met at his studio and started to talk about the conception and the lead. We had a track we were supposed to work on for this project but ended up starting from scratch by producing a new track to make the song fit best to the artists and to meet the requirements in the lead. Fun fact is that the song was eventually pitched to another place instead, so the entire project ended up completely different from how it was planned in the first place.

Since I was sitting in a session with the producer, we were able to share some instant ideas and feedback. Also, because we started the project from scratch together, there were lots of free choices to make. That sometimes means that it could make the whole process harder, floating between freedom and restriction. When making some productional choices, we had to rely on imagination on how the artists could perform the song. Luckily the producer and I knew each other's working style well, we were able to share our opinions honestly and focus on making a good song rather than getting confused and stressed.

We did some idea search together, and he made a simple 4bar loop for the first verse and pre-chorus. I started to hum some melodies, and he gave me a comment instantly if there was something valuable from the random takes. When it sounded solid, we recorded the idea with simple syllables and played it back to make sure.

At first, I came up with the melody of the second half of the verse, imagining how the band could perform the part. Since we wanted to make it shine somehow, kind of quirky start had to grab the attention and convey the energy to the pre-chorus. We decided to take a risk, which was to go with a bit of strong and high lines to be in the first verse instead of building up the energy gradually.

Since we were thinking of a very aggressive and big chorus, pre-chorus had to drive the tension to maximize the impact. The melody went a bit more mellow in

the first and then brought up the energy in the latter half. I drew an imaginary curve in my head as in Figure 8, then developed it to the entire song structure.

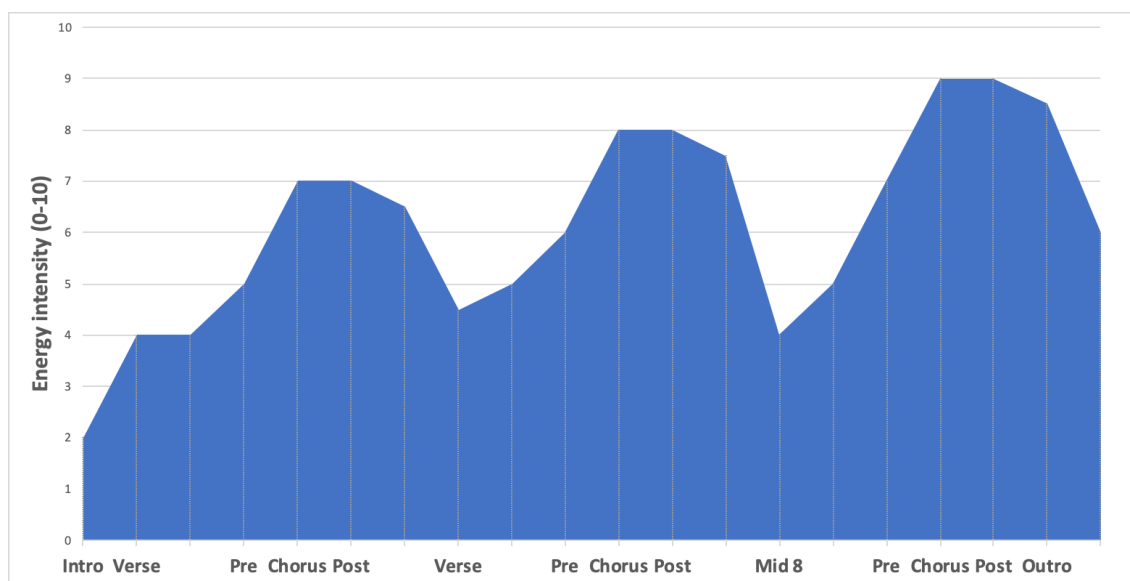


Figure 8. The conception of energy curve in <Pretty bad>

While thinking of the structure, I came up with the words 'Pretty bad'. It sounded fun with the wordplay of 'pretty', so I made the hook line with them as an impactful title of the song. The topline was built upon the basis of the hook with the particular articulation.

Again, the chorus was supposed to sound aggressive and powerful. I changed the vocal tone darker so that the feel of the chorus resonated with it. Then for the dynamic, some contrasting melodious lines followed in post-chorus, which another vocalist could sing.

The second verse had to go differently from the first this time because there needed parts for multiple members. I came up with the part which is closer to singing-rap style and then added more melodic second half to give diversity happening something new all the time. The second pre-chorus was the same from the first, but we added harmony lines to break the repetition.

The middle 8 had to be different from the previous part, but we didn't want to break the overall vibe of the song. I made chanty topline to bring the tension up

and to lower the energy intensity a bit for the last leap. Then it gradually grew back through the second half of the middle 8 and the next pre-chorus.

After playing back over and over, it was time for vocal recording. One of the advantages of being in a session was to get instant feedback and to follow the producer's guide while recording so that we could get a better result. What we more carefully considered was the vocal tone to make clear differences between parts. Plenty of harmonies and doubles were also recorded to give all the members spaces to sing and to make the song sound big.

Although the song didn't make a cut, it received good responses from the publishers. The song is in my catalog waiting for the next pitch.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Throughout this research, the K-pop scene may be summarized that the industry is integrated, the trend changes all the time, and the listeners consume the music very fast (Midem 2019). Because the market is highly competitive, building a direct network with the local labels can be a big advantage. Here is advice for publishers and songwriters who want to make a great success in South Korea:

Publishers are suggested not to rely on the sub-publishers, but to build their network with the local record labels. Try to enlarge the network pool by meeting the people face to face as often as possible for trust-building. Study in the industry needs to be accompanied. Get familiarized with the features about the labels, what kind of music they do, and what kind of demos they would want to hear from overseas songwriters. (Heymann 2020.)

The same advice works to songwriters as well; Study in industry, the music, and even the language (Heymann 2020). Songwriters should be conscious of time management because the labels may regard punctuality in terms of work etiquette. The more important factor is, however, the quality of the final product. Before submitting, the songwriters should make sure if the demo is in its best quality to prove yourself as a capable songwriter. The leads should be read carefully to interpret what kind of song the artist needs. Additionally, paying attention to syllables in the melody is recommended although the lyrics will be translated to the local language. (Mikkonen 2020.)

There are questions to be answered through further research; how Finnish publishers/songwriters will overcome the systematical distances in practice? It is found that the South Korean industry operates somewhat flexibly between systems, and it leads to a new question how the Finnish publishers need to take action when confronting issues caused by different working customs. Especially when it comes to the relation between local labels and the Finnish publishers, or local producer managers and the Finnish publishers, there must be colliding factors such as lead collection, demo management, and pitching rights because they also participate in the process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Rick Heymann

1. Could you introduce yourself a bit about your work and career?

I was born into a musical family. My mother is a world class violinist, and my father founded Naxos, the World's Largest Classical Music Label and Distributor. I am kind of a mix of both of my parents. I have some music talents but not enough to go professional as a musician, so I decided to focus more on the business side of things, and started managing artists while I was attending Belmont University (they specialise in Music Business Degrees) in Nashville, TN in the USA. I was able to get a lot of big discounts for CD Manufacturing from my family business connections which was important for a lot of Indie Bands back in the day, before iTunes, Spotify, and even other music platforms such as Soundcloud were around. Back then, everything was still on physical CDs and demos were actually sent by mail. I may have given up my age, but I actually miss the CD buying experience. These days, it's mostly in Japan where you can actually go to a music shop like Tower Records, and browse for hours. I worked around 10 Years combined at Naxos at the head office in Hong Kong and the Nashville office in the USA, before ending up in Korea to venture on my own for a bit, in the hottest music market in Asia. Originally, I wasn't planning on continuing in Music, but, I was introduced to an older producer once who asked me for a favor, and in return, I asked him for a favor as well, which was to introduce me to his music publisher, as I was exploring a return to the music business. I guess it's in my blood after all.

2. Could you tell about your role in the industry and what differentiate from traditional publishers'?

I consider myself to be a producer/ songwriter manager, song plugger, and song camp/ sessions organizer.

One company I look up to a lot is Milk&Honey in Los Angeles.

I'm nowhere near at their level in terms of my achievements, but they have an amazing roster of producers and songwriters, and they mainly "manage" producers and songwriters.

I think being a "manager" gives me the opportunity to freely work with a lot of amazing producers and songwriters, from a vast list of publishers as well as independent producers and songwriters, without pressuring them into signing a multi-year exclusive publishing deal. If I can prove myself, in a manager role first, then when I am ready to be a publisher, I think I will be able to convince more producers and songwriters to sign with me as their publisher. I think sometime in 2020, I will be ready to finally, launch my publishing company, with a long term songwriting partner of mine.

3. What do you think about the role of publishers and sub-pubs in K-pop nowadays?

I think the role of publishers and sub-pubs in K-pop is the same as anywhere else in the world. They have to offer what producers and songwriters cannot do or access on their own.

They have to: Get leads from labels, pitch songs, arrange sessions with other songwriters/ producers, handle the administration and collection of their royalties, and help settle any disputes and infringement cases. This allows the producers and songwriters to focus 100% on the creative.

I believe to be successful in any market, publishers should not just sit back and rely on their sub-pubs in those countries.

They need to go there themselves regularly, maybe 2-4 times a year. And push their sub-pubs more to arrange sessions and camps for their producers and songwriters, and push them to collect song leads regularly from the labels. The top Korean Labels here all have publishing divisions, and the assumption is that producers and songwriters signed to them get priority, and while that may be true to some degree, at the end of the day, a good song is a good song, and the top labels here still select songs from non-affiliated publishers, but if the song doesn't get heard because the relationship is not there, or if the leads weren't distributed to the producers and songwriters in a timely manner, there can be a lot of missed opportunities. But that's the nature of the publishing game. Labels receive thousands of demos here weekly, so the song either has to stand out on its own, or,

the song has to have producers or songwriters who have many cuts in the K-pop industry, to have a better chance of getting cut. But the publishers and sub-pubs have to work on it as well.

4. What are the differences between Europe and Asia in terms of the publishing system and contracts? Is there any of them you find difficult when working with other publishers/partners from Europe?

I'm not sure if there are any big differences in contracts necessarily, since everyone is somewhat intertwined. For example, an independent publisher may have Major Sub-pubs (such as Universal Music Publishing, Sony / ATV, etc...) outside of their market so there needs to be some degree of consistency in regard to contracts. I think it might also be worth it to do song by song deals with publishers first in the early stages of your career, so you can get a feel of what different publishers offer, and as you study their contracts, you will see that for the most part, except for advances, term of the agreement (number of years), percentages, territory (countries) covered, etc... a lot of the clauses are somewhat similar from contract to contract. Song by Song Deals are typically a good way to start a relationship with a publisher, and you may not immediately get the same attention as one of their exclusive producers / songwriters, but you get to know them better as people and get to know their system. Sometimes it's worth it to wait for that exclusive publishing deal because you will get better more favorable contract terms as your cuts (catalog) increases. Honestly, you have to do your own due diligence as well. Research. You can find a lot of information on the internet. Talk to other producers and songwriters about their experience. If one successful producer or songwriter changes a publisher, there's usually a good reason for that. And if they stay with one for their whole career, there's a reason for that too. But the local music societies such as KOMCA in Korea, and TEOSTO in Finland may have some slight differences in how they operate. Japan also has their own system among the major labels and artist management companies in terms of royalty splits, so there are some areas that may differ from country to country, but in the end, it all comes down to what I said earlier. You just have to go there regularly, and get accustomed to how things work locally, if it's worth it to you.

5. What are the cultural features in the local industry? What are the differences compared to other countries in your opinion?

I think one of the big cultural features is the concept of "gifts". Typically, culturally, from a business standpoint, any "gift" over a US\$100, is considered to be a bribe of sorts. I once had an embarrassing moment where I bought a pair of BEATS By Dr. Dre headphone as a gift for Christmas for an a&r contact of mine, and it got turned down. So there is a bit of that sensitivity, which you only experience by being here. But generally, most people will not turn down a meal or coffee meeting. From a music publishers' standpoint in particular, every publisher's General Manager, represents their publishing company at the Music Publisher's Association of Korea and the Chairperson of the Association rotates every year, so I would like to think that in Korea, the publishers all meet and speak to each other regularly.

Unfortunately, I am not experienced enough with publishers in other countries to compare in detail, but I would assume that there are similar systems in place. One difference I noticed fairly recently is that publishers in Scandinavian Countries tend to get a lot of support from the local government compared to other countries, and I think this may be one of the bigger differences that I've noticed. A music publishers' delegation from Scandinavia recently came together to Seoul in a group to meet with labels and publishers, as an example.

6. How does it work after a K-pop tune gets cut? And how long does it take until the actual record is released in general?

After a song is cut, there's normally a song fee that is paid out to the producer, and the labels sends out an official royalty split sheet to be filled out by all producers and songwriters involved in the song. Sometimes, edits to the tracks are requested, and the English lyrics are also requested which are then adapted to Korean. There are some local songwriters who write lyrics in Korean, but most of the demos received by the major labels here are received in English first. So the Korean Lyricist also receives a % split of the song.

In Korea, if you have a deal with KOMCA or signed to a local publisher, you can expect your first royalties to come in within 3-4 months of the songs release.

It may take 6 months for the royalties to reach you if you're overseas, and Japan royalties from Japan tend to take over a year to be received.

Records get released if you're talking about albums, when the pieces are all in place. Basically, the main single or "title song" has to be selected first. Usually without the title song, the album release is held back until that "title song" has been selected.

7. What would you advise to the overseas songwriters/producers making k-pop?

My main advice would be to first look at what made K-pop the cultural and global phenomenon that it is today, and some people may have different opinions but I think it is because everything from the training of K-pop idol trainees, to album packaging, to the music videos, to the choreography, has to be perfect, and I think K-pop became what it is today because of this cultural drive for perfection. So, if everything else has to be perfect, the music has to be as well. And what I mean by perfect is that there can be no short cuts with K-pop tracks or topline. The demo you submit to the label A&R has to be as good quality as possible while still meeting the deadline. So the producer has to trust the topline writers to do their job, and the topline writers have to trust the producer to mix and edit the demo until it is as perfect as possible. It's not always easy to determine when a demo is "ready for submission" but if you have even a single doubt, it's better to miss a deadline, than to submit a demo that is not top top quality. Because it's your reputation on the line, and A&R's may pass on your future demos if you have a reputation for submitting demos that are not top quality.

And keep an eye out for song camps with producers and songwriters hosted by publishers who have had success in K-pop market and do what you can to make sure you attend, even if you have to make that investment by yourself. And just keep improving your producing and topline skills and keep trying. Many producers/ songwriters from overseas, sometimes get their first kpop cuts, not by following trends but by simply doing what they're good at and having fun. In the end, making music needs to be fun, and if you're not having fun, or if it seems too forced, the final outcome won't be good. So, don't force yourself to try to produce K-pop. Just have fun with it and keep working hard and if you want it bad enough, you'll get it.

Appendix 2. Interview Karri Mikkonen

1. Brief introduction of yourself

My name is Karri Mikkonen, I'm a songwriter/producer signed to Sugar House Publishing. I've been writing pop music to Asia for a couple of years now, and have had some success with a cut for a Japanese artist named Kamin and multiple holds for different groups and artists in Asia.

2. Could you explain how do you work in K-pop sessions with co-writers, are there any differences compared to producing other pop music?

There are both more freedom and more restriction. First of all, the leads and briefs we get from the Asian sub-publishers are very detailed and can feel like a restriction, but they also set a clear objective for the session. Exact references, keywords and requirements etc. have been helpful for me at least. Freedom is also that we're allowed to push boundaries even to weird extremes with the song, while not going too far from the original references and guidelines. So having good taste with experimentalism is good!

Restrictions include for instance a catchy title. The title usually plays a big role for the song, so using a title which is the same as an already existing hit song could not work that well if your song can be easily associated with it. So you have to be aware of that while writing.

Being conscious about translation aspect in the lyrics can also create a weird dynamic while making the song. You know that most of what you write into the lyrics, is most likely going to be translated. Does that make the writing process of lyrics obsolete? Maybe, maybe not. Personally I think that there should be enough effort put in to the lyrics, but it should not be something to waste hours and hours for in a writing session. But it really does create a weird dynamic, since you don't know if the song is going to have the same meaning when it will be released.

3. Could you tell how the process goes after a song is pitched, and how long it can take until making the first cut?

After pitching, the song is in "the loop" in a sense, but there are a few possible outcomes for the song. I am not part of the pitching process myself, so I can only speak from my experience how it seems like to me. I'll make a list of all the options I can come up with for now:

1. It can be a cut immediately
2. It can be put on hold and then get cut
3. It can be put on hold but then rejected
4. It can be rejected in the pitch

Number 1 is great, congratulations! But in my knowledge, songs usually go to hold first and then they possibly get cut after a careful consideration from the label and all the other parties involved in the release of the song, like in number 2. Number 1 might happen on song camps and such where the artist themselves are participating and the label is also present, so decisions like this can be made immediately.

Often the songs also are on hold but then rejected because some other songs in hold or catalogues were more suitable for the upcoming release. In most cases with number 3, it means it can be pitched to different places again, but in some cases some parties want to keep it in their own catalogue even after it's released from the hold. This means that your publisher and sub-publishers have to wait a certain time or until further notice before re-pitching the song.

And in number 4. you did the song and thought it was going to be a massive hit but as soon as you send it, you get news that it isn't what they were looking for. But you don't mind, since you know you did a great song so it will find a home somewhere else, and now your publishers and sub-publishers can start pitching it to other places, and the cycle begins anew.

About the second segment of the question, how long it can take to become a cut? It can be anything between now or never. There's no right answer that'll cover all the different solutions.

But how long can it take for the writer/producer to make their first cut? Also very much depending on many things, but it's safe to say that if you keep working and working, then it should be within some years from first starting to aim for the Asian music market. For me it was 1,5 years, for my colleagues anything from between some months to 2-4 years. But like said, it is very much dependent on the quality and quantity of work.

4. About Music Finland, how the organization has been supportive to your work and career?

For me personally, not so much yet. Don't get me wrong, the cases when they have helped they've been amazing and I appreciate their work so much, but since I am also quite in the beginning of my career I haven't had the chance to fully utilise their help. For instance, their export assistance when travelling for foreign camps and organised events is awesome, but I haven't yet been to any, so this aspect hasn't been useful to me yet. But the camps and events they've organised in Finland that I've gotten the honor to be part of have been so great for learning, writing and socialising that I can't be anything else than happy for their work. Hopefully I get to benefit more from their services in the near future!

5. What would mean an exclusive publishing deal to Finnish songwriters, how important is being signed in Finland in your opinion?

I think logistically it's easier to have a contract with a company that is in the same country you live in. Usually the companies within the same country have same procedures on how to do things, so if you're working with different publishers within Finland for example, they all know how the business works here so they'll be more able to work with each other. So it can be easier to work with all the other people in your vicinity when you all have the same rules to play

with in a sense. And since the world is quite connected these days, Finnish publishing companies have connections to Asian markets so you'll get plenty of leads and opportunities.

But of course the contracts to Asian parties probably have their own benefits. I can only speculate since I have not been signed to other companies, but I think there could be more leads and opportunities for all kinds of artists that are not even that well known outside the target country. And then of course the publisher in for instance Korea probably has connections to other people working in the same field in the same country, so it will open up possibilities that maybe wouldn't occur here in Finland, or other countries. And in general, if you wish your work environment or "playground" to be in Asia, it is very understandable to go there as physically as possible. Even though writing a contract wouldn't make you physically be there, the administration of your work will physically be there, so I guess it would be working even partially as beneficial as actually being there.

6. As a Finnish K-pop producer, are there any kinds of differences you feel or think compared to other music producers in Finland?

I do feel that there are some differences. Workloads feel sometimes bigger and deadlines are for sure tighter. Of course the workload is so dependent on the songs themselves and everything, but the songs in Asian pop are usually more complex structure and arrangement wise than many of the western counterparts. Not to forget, that the acts that the songs are written to are usually groups, ranging from 4 to 9 singers or even more. It means that you have to focus on that already in the songwriting phase, making sure you somewhat know who you're writing for and make sure that all of the group members' parts are presented in the demo you send, if you really want to put effort to the songs you make. Plus just editing vocals might take some extra hours on every song. I rarely have less than 20 tracks of vocals to edit, usually 40-60, sometimes even more.

And yes the deadlines can sometimes be ridiculous. Like said the tracks are sometimes required to be really complex and the editing of vocals can take

many hours of work, but still the deadline could be within just a few days after receiving the lead. If it's a lead you really want to aim for, that means you might need to clear your schedule from everything and find co-write partners that can also work on such a tight schedule, and then of course finish the song and production and everything linked to it. Usually it works out well but sometimes the deadlines have been on such short notice that even though you've tried to finish it on time, something just doesn't click and then it misses the deadline. This isn't the end of the world, but if the song you did was so specifically tailor-made for the lead in question that it won't probably find a home in the future, it might feel like a big setback. But usually if it's a good song, it might still find use one way or another!

7. What would you wish to make the Finnish music industry go more steps closer to South Korea?

I really can't say from the publishing side that much since I am not an expert in it, but as a music lover, I think South Korea is a great example of how to monetise "exotic" music in a global scale. And with exotic I mean music from outside of the US dominated and mainly english speaking pop music. They've created massive income and interest towards them from outside of their own country, which is very appealing to me. For instance, Japan has really kept their own music to themselves, but South Korean artists have made an huge impact on the global industry with their recent success. It is surely something that Finland, and even many other countries should take note of, because just checking the numbers on the market value of music, South Korea has done an exceptional job in making themselves a massive music exporter.